

# IRAN 2018 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic Republic of Iran is an authoritarian theocratic republic with a Shia Islamic political system based on *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist or governance by the jurist). Shia clergy, most notably the *rahbar* (supreme jurist or supreme leader), and political leaders vetted by the clergy dominate key power structures.

The supreme leader is the head of state. The members of the Assembly of Experts are in theory directly elected in popular elections, and the assembly selects and may dismiss the supreme leader. The candidates for the Assembly of Experts, however, are vetted by the Guardian Council (see below) and are therefore selected indirectly by the supreme leader himself. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has held the position since 1989. He has direct or indirect control over the legislative and executive branches of government through unelected councils under his authority. The supreme leader holds constitutional authority over the judiciary, government-run media, and armed forces, and indirectly controls internal security forces and other key institutions. While mechanisms for popular election exist for the president, who is head of government, and for the Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament or *majles*), the unelected Guardian Council vets candidates and controls the election process. The supreme leader appoints half of the 12-member Guardian Council, while the head of the judiciary (who is appointed by the supreme leader) appoints the other half. Candidate vetting excluded all but six candidates of 1,636 individuals who registered for the 2017 presidential race. In May 2017 voters re-elected Hassan Rouhani as president. Restrictions on media, including censoring campaign materials and preventing prominent opposition figures from speaking publicly, limited the freedom and fairness of the elections.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

In response to nationwide protests that began in late December 2017 and continued throughout the year, the government used harsh tactics against protesters. Human rights organizations reported at least 30 deaths of protesters during the year, thousands of arrests, and suspicious deaths in custody.

The government's human rights record remained extremely poor and worsened in several key areas. Human rights issues included executions for crimes not meeting the international legal standard of "most serious crimes" and without fair trials of

individuals, including juvenile offenders; numerous reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, forced disappearance, and torture by government agents; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; systematic use of arbitrary detention and imprisonment, including hundreds of political prisoners; unlawful interference with privacy; severe restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including censorship, site blocking, and criminalization of libel; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, such as overly restrictive nongovernmental organization (NGO) laws; egregious restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on political participation; widespread corruption at all levels of government; unlawful recruitment of child soldiers by government actors to support the Assad regime in Syria; trafficking in persons; harsh governmental restrictions on the rights of women and minorities; criminalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) status or conduct; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting LGBTI persons; and outlawing of independent trade unions.

The government took few steps to investigate, prosecute, punish, or otherwise hold accountable officials who committed these abuses, many of which were perpetrated as a matter of government policy. Impunity remained pervasive throughout all levels of the government and security forces.

The country materially contributed to human rights abuses in Syria, through its military support for Syrian President Bashar Assad and Hizballah forces there; in Iraq, through its aid to certain Iraqi Shia militia groups; and in Yemen, through its support for Houthi rebels and directing authorities in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen to harass and detain Bahais because of their religious affiliation.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

The government and its agents reportedly committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, most commonly by execution after arrest and trial without due process, or for crimes that did not meet the international threshold of “most serious crimes.” Media and human rights groups also documented numerous suspicious deaths while in custody or following beatings of protesters by security forces throughout the year.

Following the January protests, according to a Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) report, at least two detainees died in detention--Sina Ghanbari in Evin Prison, and Vahid Heydari in the 12th Police Station in Arak. According to the report, the bodies of the detainees were quickly buried without an investigation or autopsy, and officials claimed the deaths were suicides. Witnesses reportedly saw evidence of a severe blow to Heydari's skull, as though struck by an axe. The government made few attempts to investigate allegations of deaths that occurred after or during torture or other physical abuse, after denying detainees medical treatment, or during public demonstrations. In August Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported at least 30 persons had been killed in protests since January. HRW reported there was no indication that officials conducted impartial investigations into those deaths or, more broadly, into law enforcement officials' use of excessive force to repress protests.

As noted by the late UN special rapporteur (UNSR) on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Asma Jahangir, and documented by international human rights observers, Revolutionary Courts continued to issue the vast majority of death sentences in the country, and trials lacked due process. Legal representation was denied during the investigation phase, and in most cases, no evidence other than confessions, often reportedly extracted through torture, was considered. Judges may also impose the death penalty on appeal, which deterred appeals in criminal cases. According to the NGO Human Rights Activists in Iran, the government does not disclose accurate numbers of those executed during a year, and as many as 60 percent of executions are kept secret.

The NGO Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) reported there were 215 executions as of mid-November, while the government officially announced only 73 executions in that time period. For many of those executions, the government did not release further information, such as names, execution dates, or crimes for which they were executed.

The Islamic penal code allows for the execution of juvenile offenders starting at age nine for girls and age 13 for boys, the legal age of majority. The government continued to execute individuals sentenced as minors as well as individuals accused of committing offenses that do not meet the international legal standard of "most serious crimes." According to the former UN high commissioner for human rights, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein, 85 juvenile offenders were on death row as of June. The government executed at least five juvenile offenders during the year, including Abolfazi Chezani Sharahi, who was executed in June. Sharahi was arrested in

2013 at age 14 and sentenced to death for allegedly stabbing his friend. A CHRI report noted serious concerns with the handling of Sharahi's case.

According to human rights organizations and media reports, the government continued to carry out some executions by torture, including hanging by cranes. Prisoners are slowly lifted from the ground by their necks and die slowly by asphyxiation. In addition, adultery remains punishable by death by stoning, although provincial authorities have reportedly been ordered not to provide public information about stoning sentences since 2001, according to the NGO Justice for Iran.

Authorities continued to carry out executions for crimes not meeting the international legal standard of "most serious crimes." Although the majority of executions were reportedly for murder during the year, the law also provides for the death penalty in cases of conviction for "attempts against the security of the state," "outrage against high-ranking officials," *moharebeh* (which has a variety of broad interpretations, including "waging war against God"), *fisad fil-arz* (corruption on earth, including apostasy or heresy), rape, adultery, recidivist alcohol use, consensual same-sex sexual conduct, and "insults against the memory of Imam Khomeini and against the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic."

Prosecutors frequently used "waging war against God" as a capital offense against political dissidents and journalists, accusing them of "struggling against the precepts of Islam" and against the state that upholds those precepts. Authorities expanded the scope of this charge to include "working to undermine the Islamic establishment" and "cooperating with foreign agents or entities." The judiciary is required to review and validate death sentences.

The overall number of executions decreased in comparison with 2017, reportedly as a result of an amendment passed in August 2017 by parliament to the 1997 Law to Combat Drugs to raise the threshold for the death penalty for drug-related offenses. The law went into effect in November 2017. Under the amended law, capital punishment applies to the possession, sale, or transport of more than approximately 110 pounds of natural drugs, such as opium, or approximately 4.4 to 6.6 pounds of manufactured narcotics, such as heroin or cocaine. According to the previous law, capital punishment applied to similar offenses involving slightly more than 11 pounds of natural drugs or two-thirds of a pound of manufactured drugs. Capital punishment, however, still applies to drug offenses involving smaller quantities of narcotics, if the crime is carried out using weapons, employing minors, or involving someone in a leadership role in a trafficking ring

or someone who has previously been convicted of drug crimes and given a prison sentence of more than 15 years.

In January Judiciary Chief Sadegh Larijani ordered judges to halt the death sentences of drug offenders potentially affected by this change to the law while their cases were reviewed. In July state media quoted Tehran's Prosecutor General Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi announcing that of the 3,000 requests the government had received from death-row prisoners and from those sentenced to life imprisonment, 1,700 sentences had been reviewed and most of those sentences had been reduced, while 1,300 cases remained to be reviewed.

Mohammad Salas, a Gonabadi Sufi bus driver, was executed by hanging at Rajai Shahr Prison on June 18. Salas was convicted of killing three police officers during clashes between members of the Gonabadi Sufi dervishes and security forces in Tehran in February. Salas and his supporters maintained his innocence throughout a trial that Amnesty International called "grossly unfair," stating he had been tortured into a forced confession and that key defense witnesses who could have testified that Salas was already in custody at the time of the police officers' deaths were dismissed.

International and national media reported on a terrorist attack on a military parade in Ahwaz, the capital of Khuzestan Province, on September 22. According to reports, at least 29 military personnel and civilians were killed in the attack, with more than 70 wounded. A separatist group called the Ahwaz National Resistance, as well as the Islamic State, claimed responsibility for the attack.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were reports of politically motivated abductions during the year attributed to government officials. Plainclothes officials often seized journalists and activists without warning, and government officials refused to acknowledge custody or provide information on them. In March NGO PEN International reported the enforced disappearance of poet Mohammad Bamm following his arrest by security forces in December 2017. According to the report, Bamm was released on March 19 after being held in solitary confinement and allegedly tortured in Ahwaz Prison while his whereabouts were unknown. He was accused of causing harm to public order and security, participating in the leadership of illegal demonstrations, and insulting the supreme leader.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

Although the constitution prohibits all forms of torture “for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information,” use of physical and mental torture to coerce confessions remained prevalent, especially during pretrial detention. There were credible reports that security forces and prison personnel tortured and abused detainees and prisoners throughout the year.

Commonly reported methods of torture and abuse in prisons included threats of execution or rape, forced tests of virginity and “sodomy,” sleep deprivation, electroshock, burnings, the use of pressure positions, and severe and repeated beatings. Former UNSR Jahangir highlighted reports of prisoners subjected to physical abuse, as well as to blackmail.

Human rights organizations frequently cited some prison facilities, including Evin Prison in Tehran and Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj, for their use of cruel and prolonged torture of political opponents, particularly Wards 209 and Two of Evin Prison, reportedly controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

In September the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) reported the case of at least seven detainees subjected to torture by the IRGC’s Saravan Intelligence Unit. Saravan, located in Sistan va Baluchestan Province, is home to the Baloch ethnic minority community. According to the report, the prisoners were religious seminary students who were lashed with electrical wires and shocked with electricity, causing them to be unable to walk. IRGC-run detention centers reportedly used a technique called the “miracle bed,” which includes tying detainees to a bed frame and repeatedly flogging and electrocuting them until they “confess.”

NGOs reported that prison guards tortured Sunni Muslim prisoners at Ardabil Prison for their religious beliefs; numerous inmates at the prison were Sunni Muslims, while the guards were predominantly Shia. Guards also reportedly retaliated against prisoners there for “security issues” that occurred elsewhere in the country. According to reports, torture at Ardabil included severe beatings, being tied to flag poles for prolonged durations of time, and being forced to watch executions of fellow prisoners.

Authorities also allegedly maintained unofficial secret prisons and detention centers outside the national prison system where abuse reportedly occurred.

Judicially sanctioned corporal punishments continued. These included flogging, blinding, stoning, and amputation, which the government defends as “punishment,” not torture. At least 148 crimes are punishable by flogging, while 20 can carry the penalty of amputation.

In January Amnesty International reported that authorities amputated the hand of a man sentenced for stealing livestock. The amputation by guillotine, which Amnesty characterized as “unspeakably cruel,” took place at the central prison in Mashhad, Razavi Khorasan Province.

In July Amnesty International reported the public flogging of a man in Niazmand Square, Kashmar, Razavi Khorasan Province, for a sentence he had received 10 years before for consuming alcohol at a wedding when he was 14-15 years old. National media outlets posted a picture showing the man roped to a tree, lashed by a masked man and his back covered in blood, with a crowd of persons watching.

Extrajudicial punishments by authorities involving degrading public humiliation of alleged offenders were also frequently reported throughout the year. For example, Maedeh Hojabri was arrested for posting videos of herself dancing on social media, and authorities compelled her to confess to this “crime” on state television.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions were harsh and potentially life threatening due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, physical abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care. Prisoner hunger strikes in protest of their treatment were frequent.

Physical Conditions: Overcrowding remained a problem in prisons with many prisoners forced to sleep on floors, in hallways, or in prison yards. The human rights NGO United for Iran, which closely monitored prison conditions, reported in 2017 that the prisoner population was three times the capacity of the country’s prisons and detention centers. State-run Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported that the head of the general court of Ardabil said the number of prisoners in Ardabil Prison was at three times its capacity.

There were reported deaths in custody. In March HRW reported at least five deaths in custody since December 2017. The government ruled three of the deaths--of Sina Ghanbari, Vahid Heydari, and Kavous Seyed-Emami, a prominent

Iranian-Canadian environmentalist--to be suicides, claims the deceased's family members and human rights groups strongly contested (see section 1.d.).

According to IranWire and human rights groups, guards beat both political and nonpolitical prisoners during raids on wards, performed nude body searches in front of other prisoners, and threatened prisoners' families. In some instances, according to HRANA, guards singled out political prisoners for harsher treatment.

Prison authorities often refused to provide medical treatment for pre-existing conditions, injuries that prisoners suffered at the hands of prison authorities, or illnesses due to the poor sanitary conditions in prison. Human rights organizations reported that authorities also used denial of medical care as a form of punishment for prisoners and as an intimidation tool against prisoners who filed complaints or challenged the authorities. In March CHRI reported that dozens of political prisoners were denied medical treatment and leave despite visible symptoms of their deteriorating health. The report mentioned specifically the cases of Vahed Kholousi, an education rights activist held in Rajai Shahr Prison since 2015; Alireza Golipour, held in Evin Prison since 2012 and suffering from worsening seizures and heart problems; and Mohammad Saber Malek-Raeisi, a Baluchi Sunni Muslim reportedly in critical condition from repeated severe beatings by guards in Ardabil Prison.

Medical services for female prisoners were reported as grossly inadequate. Human rights groups highlighted the case of children's rights activist Atena Daemi, serving a seven-year sentence for meeting with the families of political prisoners, criticizing the government on Facebook, and condemning the 1988 mass executions of prisoners in the country. In January Daemi was beaten and transferred from Evin Prison to Shahr-e Rey Prison (also known as Gharchak prison) in the city of Varamin, south of Tehran, which held 1,000 female prisoners in cramped, unsanitary conditions. Human rights organizations reported that prison authorities refused to allow Daemi and other prisoners access to necessary medical care.

According to Amnesty International, at least 10 Gonabadi Sufi dervish women were unjustly detained in Shahr-e Rey Prison since February. The women were routinely denied urgently needed medical care and kept in unsanitary, inhuman conditions. The report noted that prison doctors verbally abused the women and guards physically mistreated them.

The human rights community and international media reported on frequent water shortages, intolerable heat, unsanitary living spaces, and poor ventilation in prisons throughout the country.

UNSR Jahangir and others condemned the inhuman, life-threatening conditions of Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj following the hunger strike of numerous political prisoners that began at the end of July 2017. Prisoners had protested the sudden transfer of more than 50 political prisoners, including at least 15 Bahais, whom authorities moved without notice from Ward 12 to the prison's high security Ward 10.

Authorities reportedly deprived prisoners of medicine, adequate medical treatment, and personal belongings, and sealed prisoners' cells with iron sheets that limited air circulation. Jahangir expressed deep alarm at the deteriorating medical conditions of the political prisoners and at reports of their continued torture following the transfer. In March CHRI reported that political prisoners at the prison continued to be subjected to inhuman living conditions as punishment for their hunger strike.

Authorities occasionally held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. Also, according to HRANA, juvenile detainees were held with adult prisoners in some prisons, including Saghez Central Prison in Kurdistan Province. Authorities held women separately from men.

In 2017 Mohammad Javad Fathi, a member of parliament's judicial committee, was quoted in media saying that 2,300 children lived in prisons with their incarcerated mothers. Fathi urged the Prisons Organization to provide transparent statistics on the number of imprisoned mothers. IranWire reported that multiple prisons across the country held older children who lived with their incarcerated mothers without access to medical care or educational and recreational facilities.

There were numerous reports of prisoner suicides throughout the year in response to prison conditions or mistreatment. In August HRANA reported on the suicide attempts of five prisoners on the same day at Sanandaj Central Prison. The five prisoners tried to kill themselves either by taking pills or hanging, all reportedly in response to prison conditions and the mistreatment of the prisoners and their family members by officials. In April HRANA reported that Vahid Safarzehi, held in the Central Prison of Zahedan, ingested a razor to commit suicide after his repeated requests for furlough to accompany his sick mother to the hospital were denied. He had previously attempted suicide by drinking acid.

In August CHRI shared the report of a journalist who had been detained in the Great Tehran Penitentiary, the largest detention facility. The journalist recounted the inhuman conditions of the prison as beyond the limits of human tolerance. According to the journalist, dozens of new prisoners were admitted to the prison a day and initially kept for days in a “sewer”-like quarantine unit without ventilation or washing facilities. More than 80 percent of the prisoners in quarantine were reportedly homeless drug addicts requiring immediate medical attention; they could hardly stand, and their vomit covered the floor.

Prisoner hunger strikes occurred frequently in prisons throughout the country, and reports on prisons’ inhuman conditions continued. These included infestations with cockroaches and mice, chronic overcrowding, poor ventilation, prisoners being forced to sleep on the floor with little bedding, and insufficient food and water.

The political prisoner Vahid Sayyadi-Nasiri died on December 12 after being on hunger strike since October 13. Sayyadi-Nasiri went on hunger strike to protest inhumane prison conditions at Iran’s Langroud Prison in Qom and government authorities’ denial of his right to counsel.

Administration: According to reports from human rights NGOs, prison authorities regularly denied prisoners access to visitors, telephone, and other correspondence privileges. As noted above, prisoners practicing a religion other than Shia Islam reported experiencing discrimination while incarcerated.

Authorities did not initiate credible investigations into allegations of inhuman conditions or suspicious deaths in custody. Prisoners were able to submit complaints to judicial authorities but often faced censorship or retribution in the form of slander, beatings, torture, and denial of medication or furlough requests. Families of executed prisoners did not always receive notification of their scheduled executions, or if they did, it was often on very short notice. Authorities frequently denied families the ability to perform funeral rites or families’ request for the findings from an impartial autopsy.

Independent Monitoring: The government did not permit independent monitoring of prison conditions. Prisoners and their families often wrote letters to authorities and, in some cases, to UN bodies to highlight and protest their treatment. UNSR Jahangir reported that authorities sometimes threatened prisoners after accusing them of contacting her office.

For more information on treatment of political prisoners, see section 1.e., Political Prisoners and Detainees.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

Although the constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, the practices occurred frequently during the year. President Rouhani's 2016 "Citizen's Rights Charter" enumerates various freedoms, including "security of their person, property, dignity, employment, legal and judicial process, social security and the like." The government did not implement these provisions. Detainees may appeal their sentences in court but are not entitled to compensation for detention.

#### **Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

Several agencies shared responsibility for law enforcement and maintaining order, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and law enforcement forces under the Interior Ministry, which report to the president, and the IRGC, which reports directly to the supreme leader. The supreme leader holds ultimate authority over all security agencies.

The Basij, a volunteer paramilitary group with local organizations across the country, sometimes acted as an auxiliary law enforcement unit subordinate to IRGC ground forces. Basij units often engaged in repression of political opposition elements or intimidation of civilians accused of violating the country's strict moral code, without formal guidance or supervision from superiors.

Impunity remained a problem within all security forces. Human rights groups frequently accused regular and paramilitary security forces, such as the Basij, of committing numerous human rights abuses, including acts of violence against protesters and participants in public demonstrations. According to Tehran Prosecutor General Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi, the attorney general is responsible for investigating and punishing security force abuses, but the process was not transparent, and there were few reports of government actions to discipline abusers. In a notable exception, in November 2017 authorities sentenced former Tehran prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi to two years in prison for his alleged responsibility for the torture and death of protesters in 2009. Media reported that Mortazavi, after initial reports that he had disappeared, was taken to prison in April to commence his sentence.

## Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The constitution and law require a warrant or subpoena for an arrest and state that arrested persons should be informed of the charges against them within 24 hours. Authorities, however, held some detainees, at times incommunicado, for days, weeks, or months without charge or trial and frequently denied them contact with family or timely access to legal representation.

The law obligates the government to provide indigent defendants with attorneys for certain types of crimes. The courts set prohibitively high bail, even for lesser crimes, and in many cases, courts did not set bail. Authorities often compelled detainees and their families to submit property deeds to post bail, effectively silencing them due to fear of losing their families' property.

The government continued to use house arrest without due process to restrict movement and communication. At year's end former presidential candidates Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, as well as Mousavi's wife Zahra Rahnavard, remained under house arrest imposed in 2011 without formal charges. Security forces continued to restrict their access to visitors and information. Concerns persisted over Karroubi's deteriorating health, reportedly exacerbated by his treatment by authorities.

Arbitrary Arrest: Authorities commonly used arbitrary arrests to impede alleged antiregime activities. Plainclothes officers arrived unannounced at homes or offices, arrested persons, conducted raids, and confiscated private documents, passports, computers, electronic media, and other personal items without warrants or assurances of due process.

Individuals often remained in detention facilities for long periods without charges or trials, and authorities sometimes prevented them from informing others of their whereabouts for several days. Authorities often denied detainees' access to legal counsel during this period.

International media and human rights organizations documented an increase in detentions of dual nationals--individuals who are citizens of both Iran and another country--for arbitrary and prolonged detention on politically motivated charges. One of the environmentalists detained, Iranian-Canadian Kavous Seyed-Emami, died in custody in February in Evin Prison, in what authorities called a suicide (see section 1.c.). Dual nationals, like other citizens, faced a variety of due process

violations, including lack of prompt access to a lawyer of their choosing and brief trials during which they were not allowed to defend themselves.

In September, Human Rights Watch documented the cases of 14 dual or foreign nationals whom the IRGC's Intelligence Organization has arrested since 2014. Several of those were American citizens, including Xiyue Wang, a doctoral student at Princeton University, who was arrested in August 2016. Wang had been conducting research for his dissertation on the history of the Qajar dynasty. In July 2017, Iranian state media reported that a Revolutionary Court had sentenced Wang to 10 years in prison on charges of "cooperating with an enemy state." Revolutionary Court Judge Abolqasem Salavati presided over the case. In August 2018, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention said Wang's detention was arbitrary and "motivated by the fact that he is a United States citizen," and recommended the appropriate remedy would be to release Mr. Wang immediately.

Spiritual leader Mohammad Ali Taheri, founder of the spiritual doctrine Interuniversalism and the Erfan-e Halgheh group, had been in prison--mostly in solitary confinement--since his arrest in 2011. He was sentenced to five years in 2011 for "insulting the sanctities" and then was sentenced to death in 2015 for "corruption on earth." In August 2017 Taheri was sentenced to death for a second time. The Supreme Court subsequently rejected Taheri's death sentence and ordered him retried. At year's end Taheri was serving a second five-year prison sentence handed down in March. According to media and NGO reports, the IRGC also detained dozens of Taheri's followers.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was often arbitrarily lengthy, particularly in cases involving alleged violations of national security law. In other cases authorities held persons incommunicado for lengthy periods before permitting them to contact family members. Instances of unjust and arbitrary pretrial detention were commonplace and well documented throughout the year involving numerous prisoners of conscience, particularly following the countrywide protests beginning in December 2017. According to HRW, a judge may prolong detention at his discretion, and pretrial detentions often lasted for months. Often authorities held pretrial detainees in custody with the general prison population.

According to HRW, since January the IRGC's intelligence organization had arbitrarily arrested at least 50 environmental activists across the country and imprisoned them without bringing formal charges or evidence. These included several environmentalists affiliated with the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation who were arrested in January for espionage. They were accused of using

environmental projects as a cover to collect classified information. In July family members of Houman Jokar, Sepideh Kashani, Niloufar Bayani, Amirhossein Khaleghi, Sam Rajabi, Taher Ghadirian, Abdolreza Kouhpayeh, and Morad Tahbaz demanded their release in a published open letter, saying the environmentalists had been imprisoned for six months without a “shred of evidence.”

#### Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court:

Detainees may appeal their sentences in courts of law but are not entitled to compensation for detention and were often held for extended periods without any legal proceedings.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution provides that the judiciary be “an independent power” that is “free from every kind of unhealthy relation and connection.” The court system was subjected to political influence, and judges were appointed “in accordance with religious criteria.”

The supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary. The head of the judiciary, members of the Supreme Court, and the prosecutor general were clerics. International observers continued to criticize the lack of independence of the country’s judicial system and judges and maintained that trials disregarded international standards of fairness.

#### **Trial Procedures**

According to the constitution and law, a defendant has the right to a fair trial, to be presumed innocent until convicted, to have access to a lawyer of his or her choice, and to appeal convictions in most cases that involve major penalties. These rights were not upheld.

Panels of judges adjudicate trials in civil and criminal courts. Human rights activists reported trials in which authorities appeared to have determined the verdicts in advance, and defendants did not have the opportunity to confront their accusers or meet with lawyers. For journalists and defendants charged with crimes against national security, the law restricts the choice of attorneys to a government-approved list.

When postrevolutionary statutes do not address a situation, the government advised judges to give precedence to their knowledge and interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). Under this method judges may find a person guilty based on their own “divine knowledge.”

The constitution does not provide for the establishment or the mandate of the Revolutionary Courts. The courts were created pursuant to the former supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini’s edict immediately following the 1979 revolution, with a sharia judge appointed as the head of the courts. They were intended as a temporary emergency measure to try high-level officials of the deposed monarchy and purge threats to the regime. The courts, however, became institutionalized and continue to operate in parallel to the criminal justice system. Human rights groups and international observers often identify the Revolutionary Courts, which are generally responsible for hearing the cases of political prisoners, as routinely employing grossly unfair trials without due process, handing down predetermined verdicts, and rubberstamping executions for political purposes. These unfair practices reportedly occur during all stages of criminal proceedings in Revolutionary Courts, including the initial prosecution and pretrial investigation, first instance trial, and review by higher courts.

The IRGC and Intelligence Ministry reportedly determine many aspects of Revolutionary Court cases. Most of the important political cases are referred to a handful of branches of the Revolutionary Courts, whose judges often have negligent legal training and are not independent.

During the year human rights groups and international media noted the absence of procedural safeguards in criminal trials. On September 8, three Kurdish men--Zaniar Moradi, Loghman Moradi, and Ramin Hossein Panahi--were executed at Rajai Shahr Prison following what Amnesty International called “grossly unfair” trials in which the men were denied access to lawyers.

Courts admitted as evidence confessions made under duress or torture. UNSR Jahangir stated that the government relied on physical and mental torture to coerce confessions from prisoners during pretrial detention and interrogations. Based on reports from numerous media and human rights groups, there was a noticeable increase during the year in the authorities’ use of torture, as well as forced videotaped confessions that the government later televised. A forced confession of a teenage girl, Maedeh Hojabri, was shown on state television on July 7, in which the girl confessed to the “crime” of posting a video of herself dancing on Instagram.

The Special Clerical Court is headed by a Shia Islamic legal scholar, overseen by the supreme leader, and charged with investigating alleged offenses committed by clerics and issuing rulings based on an independent interpretation of Islamic legal sources. As with the Revolutionary Courts, the constitution does not provide for the Special Clerical Court, which operated outside the judiciary's purview. Clerical courts were used to prosecute Shia clerics who expressed controversial ideas and participated in activities outside the sphere of religion, such as journalism or reformist political activities.

In March Ayatollah Hossein Shirazi, son of Grand Ayatollah Sadeq Shirazi, was arrested in Qom for criticizing "governance by the jurist," the foundational principle underpinning the supreme leader's power, and calling the supreme leader "the pharaoh" during a lecture. The Special Clerical Court initially heard Shirazi's case and, according to reports in the media, sentenced him to 120 years in prison. Following the eruption of protests inside the country and among Shia communities outside the country, the court reportedly withdrew the sentence and released Shirazi on bail.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

Official statistics regarding the number of citizens imprisoned for their political beliefs were not available. According to United for Iran, on average there were an estimated 800-900 prisoners of conscience held in the country at any given time during the year, including those jailed for their religious beliefs.

The government often charged political dissidents with vague crimes, such as "antirevolutionary behavior," "corruption on earth," "siding with global arrogance," "waging war against God," and "crimes against Islam." Prosecutors imposed strict penalties on government critics for minor violations.

The political crimes law defines a political crime as an insult against the government, as well as "the publication of lies." Political crimes are those acts "committed with the intent of reforming the domestic or foreign policies of Iran," while those with the intent to damage "the foundations of the regime" are considered national security crimes. The court and the Public Prosecutor's Office retain responsibility for determining the nature of the crime.

The political crimes law grants the accused certain rights during arrest and imprisonment. Political criminals should be held in detention facilities separate

from ordinary criminals. They should also be exempt from wearing prison uniforms, not subject to rules governing repeat offenses, not subject to extradition, and exempt from solitary confinement unless judicial officials deem it necessary. Political criminals also have the right to see and correspond with immediate family regularly and to access books, newspapers, radio, and television.

Many of the law's provisions have not been implemented, and the government continued to arrest and charge students, journalists, lawyers, political activists, women's activists, artists, and members of religious minorities with "national security" crimes that do not fall under the political crimes law. Political prisoners were also at greater risk of torture and abuse in detention and often were mixed with the general prison population. The government often placed political prisoners in prisons far from their families, denied them correspondence rights, and held them in solitary confinement for long periods. Human rights activists and international media also reported cases of political prisoners confined with accused and convicted violent criminals, and with criminals carrying contagious diseases such as HIV or hepatitis. Former prisoners reported that authorities often threatened political prisoners with transfer to criminal wards, where attacks were more likely.

The government reportedly held some detainees in prison for years on unfounded charges of sympathizing with real or alleged terrorist groups.

The government issued travel bans on some former political prisoners, barred them from working in their occupations for years after incarceration, and imposed internal exile on some. During the year authorities occasionally gave political prisoners suspended sentences and released them on bail with the understanding that renewed political activity would result in their return to prison. The government did not permit international humanitarian organizations or UN representatives access to political prisoners.

A revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced prominent human rights defender and journalist Narges Mohammadi, arrested in 2016, to 16 years in prison. The court charged Mohammadi with "propaganda against the state," "assembly and collusion against national security," and establishing the illegal Step by Step to Stop the Death Penalty organization, allegedly harming national security. Prison authorities granted Mohammadi limited medical attention for significant health problems during the year but continued to deny her family visitation and telephone calls, according to media reports. The government repeatedly rejected Mohammadi's request for judicial review.

Seven Bahai leaders were arrested in 2008, convicted of “disturbing national security,” “spreading propaganda against the regime,” as well as “engaging in espionage,” and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Their sentences were subsequently reduced to 10 years. The last individual member of the group in prison, Afif Naeimi, was released on December 20.

Lawyers who defended political prisoners were often arrested. The government continued to imprison lawyers and others affiliated with the Defenders of Human Rights Center advocacy group. As of September the government had arrested at least eight prominent human rights attorneys during the year.

Authorities arrested human rights attorney Nasrin Sotoudeh on June 13 on national security charges, claiming she had been issued a five-year prison sentence in absentia for representing political prisoners and women who protested against the country’s compulsory hijab law. Sotoudeh was previously arrested in 2010 and sentenced to a six-year prison term for her human rights work representing activists and journalists, until receiving a pardon in 2013.

International human rights organizations reported the arrest of several other human rights lawyers during the year because of their work. On August 31, government agents arrested Payam Derafshan and Farrokh Forouzan. Earlier in the year, Arash Keykhosravi and Ghasem Sholeh Saadi were also unjustly detained. Zaynab Taheri was arrested on June 19 after publicly advocating for her client, Mohammad Salas (see section 1.a.).

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Citizens had limited ability to sue the government and were not able to bring lawsuits through the courts against the government for civil or human rights violations.

### **Property Restitution**

The constitution allows the government to confiscate property acquired illicitly or in a manner not in conformity with Islamic law. The government appeared to target ethnic and religious minorities in invoking this provision.

### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution states that “reputation, life, property, [and] dwelling[s]” are protected from trespass, except as “provided by law.” The government routinely infringed on this right. Security forces monitored the social activities of citizens, entered homes and offices, monitored telephone conversations and internet communications, and opened mail without court authorization. The government also detained the family members of activists as a form of intimidation and reprisal.

According to international human rights organizations, the government arrested and intimidated BBC employees’ family members based in Iran. Separately, the government also compelled family members of journalists from other media outlets abroad to defame their relatives on state television.

Nasrin Sotoudeh’s husband, Reza Khandan, was arrested in September for publicly expressing his support for his detained wife, according to media reports.

### **g. Abuses in Internal Conflicts**

Syria: Iran recruited Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani Shia fighters to support the Assad regime and thus prolonging the civil war, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians. According to HRW, the IRGC since 2013 allegedly recruited thousands of undocumented Afghans living in Iran to fight in Syria, threatening forced deportation in some cases.

Child Soldiers: In an October 2017 report, HRW asserted that the IRGC had recruited Afghan children as young as age 14 to serve in the Fatemioun Brigade, reportedly an Iranian-supported Afghan group fighting alongside government forces in Syria, and noted that at least 14 Afghan children had been killed fighting in the Syrian conflict. Another HRW report in November 2017 documented an interview by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) agency with a 13-year-old Afghan boy from Iran, conducted in the Syrian border city of Abu Kamal. During the interview the boy called himself a “defender of the shrine” and expressed his desire to fight in Syria.

Iraq: Iran directly supported certain Iraqi Shia militias, including designated foreign terrorist organization Kata’ib Hizballah, which reportedly was complicit in summary executions and other human rights abuses of civilians in Iraq.

Yemen: Since 2015 Iran provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen and proliferated weapons that exacerbated and prolonged the conflict. Also, according to a Bahai International Community report in April, Iranian authorities were directing authorities in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen to harass and detain Bahais because of their religious affiliation.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, except when words are deemed “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.” According to the law, “anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment.”

Article 26 of the 2016 Charter on Citizens’ Rights acknowledges the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression. The charter grants citizens the right freely to seek, receive, publish, and communicate views and information, using any means of communication, but it has not been implemented.

The law provides for prosecution of persons accused of instigating crimes against the state or national security or “insulting” Islam. The government severely restricted freedom of speech and of the press and used the law to intimidate or prosecute persons who directly criticized the government or raised human rights problems, as well as to bring ordinary citizens into compliance with the government’s moral code.

Freedom of Expression: Authorities did not permit individuals to criticize publicly the country’s system of government, supreme leader, or official religion. Security forces and the judiciary punished those who violated these restrictions, as well as those who publicly criticized the president, cabinet, and parliament.

The government monitored meetings, movements, and communications of its citizens and often charged persons with crimes against national security and of insulting the regime, citing as evidence letters, emails, and other public and private communications. Authorities threatened arrest or punishment for the expression of ideas or images they viewed as violations of the legal moral code.

Press and Media Freedom: The government's Press Supervisory Board issues press licenses, which it sometimes revoked in response to articles critical of the government or the regime, or it did not renew them for individuals facing criminal charges or incarcerated for political reasons. During the year the government banned, blocked, closed, or censored publications deemed critical of officials.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Ershad*) severely limited and controlled foreign media organizations' ability to work in the country. The ministry required foreign correspondents to provide detailed travel plans and topics of proposed stories before granting visas, limiting their ability to travel within the country, and forced them to work with a local "minder."

Under the constitution private broadcasting is illegal. The government maintained a monopoly over all television and radio broadcasting facilities through IRIB, a government agency. Radio and television programming, the principal source of news for many citizens, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access, reflected the government's political and socioreligious ideology. The government jammed satellite broadcasts as signals entered the country, a continuous practice since at least 2003. Satellite dishes remained illegal but ubiquitous. Those who distributed, used, or repaired satellite dishes faced fines up to 90 million rials (\$2,100). Police, using warrants provided by the judiciary, launched campaigns to confiscate privately owned satellite dishes throughout the country.

Under the constitution the supreme leader appoints the head of the audiovisual policy agency, a council composed of representatives of the president, judiciary, and parliament. The Ministry of Culture reviews all potential publications, including foreign printed materials, prior to their domestic release and may deem books unpublishable, remove text, or require word substitutions for terms deemed inappropriate.

Independent print media companies existed, but the government severely limited their operations.

Violence and Harassment: The government and its agents harassed, detained, abused, and prosecuted publishers, editors, and journalists, including those involved in internet-based media, for their reporting. The government also harassed man reW\*ñBT/F2 14.04 Tf1 0 0 1 219.89 175.94 Tm0 g0 G[( )] TJ1.11 320.81 Tm0 g0

December 2017. According to RSF, several citizen journalists were beaten and arrested while recording renewed protests in Tehran on June 25-26. Authorities banned national and international media outlets from covering the demonstrations in an attempt to censor coverage of the protests and to intimidate citizens from disseminating information about them.

In February, RSF reported that several employees of the Sufi news website *Majzooban Nor* were arrested while covering clashes between security forces and Gonabadi Dervishes. *Majzooban Nor* was the only independent website covering the dervishes, and most of the arrested journalists were reportedly severely beaten by police and militia members. In July and August, *Majzooban Nor* journalists were sentenced for lashes and prison terms of up to 26 years in connection for their work covering the dervishes' protests.

According to CHRI, in August the Mizan News Agency, which functions as the official news website of the judiciary, published statements that human rights activists interpreted as a call for vigilante violence against BBC journalists and their families. The BBC had filed a complaint at the UN Human Rights Council in March against Iranian authorities for their campaign of harassment against BBC Persian staff.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The law forbids government censorship but also prohibits dissemination of information the government considers “damaging.” During the year the government censored publications that criticized official actions or contradicted official views or versions of events. “Damaging” information included discussions of women’s rights, the situation of minorities, criticism of government corruption, and references to mistreatment of detainees.

In September media reported that General Prosecutor Mohammad Jafar Montazeri ordered the closure of *Sedayeh Eslahat*, a reformist newspaper, on charges of insulting Shia Islam. According to reports, the newspaper had published an article on female-to-male sex reassignment surgery, titling the article, “Ruqayyah became Mahdi after 22 years.” Ruqayyah was the daughter of Hussein, a revered Shia Imam, while Mahdi, according to Shia beliefs, is the name of the 12th Shia Imam. Montazeri also called for the punishment of the newspaper’s editor.

Officials routinely intimidated journalists into practicing self-censorship. Public officials often filed criminal complaints against newspapers, and the Press Supervisory Board, which regulates media content and publication, referred such complaints to the Press Court for further action, including possible closure,

suspension, and fines. IRNA determined the main topics and types of news to be covered and distributed topics required for reporting directly to various media outlets, according to the IHRDC.

Libel/Slander Laws: The government commonly used libel laws or cited national security to suppress criticism. According to the law, if any publication contains personal insults, libel, false statements, or criticism, the insulted individual has the right to respond in the publication within one month. By law “insult” or “libel” against the government, government representatives, or foreign officials while they are on Iranian soil, as well as “the publication of lies” with the intent to alter, but not overthrow, the government are considered political crimes and subject to certain trial and detention procedures (see section 1.e.). The government applied the law throughout the year, often citing statements made in various media outlets or on internet platforms that criticized the government, in the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing of individuals for crimes against national security.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet, monitored private online communications, and censored online content. Individuals and groups practiced self-censorship online.

The Ministries of Culture and of Information and Communications Technology are the main regulatory bodies for content and internet systems in the country. The Supreme Leader’s Office also includes the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, charged with regulating content and systems. The government collected personally identifiable information in connection with citizens’ peaceful expression of political, religious, or ideological opinion or beliefs.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, 60 percent of the population used the internet in 2017. According to the Ministry of Culture, 70 percent of youth between the ages of 15 and 29 used the internet. NGOs reported the government continued to filter content on the internet to ban access to particular sites and to filter traffic based on its content. The law makes it illegal to distribute circumvention tools and virtual private networks, and Minister of Information and Communications Technology Jahromi was quoted in the press stating that using circumvention tools is illegal.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance must approve all internet service providers. The government also requires all owners of websites and blogs in the

country to register with the agencies that compose the Commission to Determine the Instances of Criminal Content (also referred to as the Committee in Charge of Determining Unauthorized Websites or Committee in Charge of Determining Offensive Content), the governmental organization that determines censoring criteria. These agencies include the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, the Intelligence Ministry, and the Tehran Public Prosecutor's Office.

Ministry of Information and Communications Technology regulations prohibit households and cybercafes from having high-speed internet access. The government periodically reduced internet speed to discourage downloading material.

According to media reports, former minister of information and communications technology Mahmoud Vaezi announced in 2017 that the government had improved methods to control the internet and had shut down a number of online platforms. The government's decade-long project to build a National Information Network (NIN) resulted in its launch in 2016. The NIN enabled officials to allow higher speed and easier access on domestic traffic, while limiting international internet traffic. RSF reported that the NIN acted like an intranet system, with full content control and user identification. Authorities may disconnect this network from global internet content, and they reportedly intended to use it to provide government propaganda and disrupt circumvention tools. During nationwide protests in December 2017, authorities used NIN technology to cut off access to the global internet for 30 minutes.

Authorities continued to block online messaging tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, although the government operated Twitter accounts under the names of Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Zarif, and other government-associated officials and entities.

Government organizations, including the Basij "Cyber Council," the Cyber Police, and the Cyber Army, which observers presumed to be controlled by the IRGC, monitored, identified, and countered alleged cyberthreats to national security. These organizations especially targeted citizens' activities on officially banned social networking websites such as Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr, and they reportedly harassed persons who criticized the government or raised sensitive social problems.

According to a report by CHRI, in May the Judiciary (the prosecutor of Branch 2 of the Culture and Media Prosecutor's Office in Tehran) blocked the popular messaging app Telegram. Telegram, used by approximately half the population as a platform for a wide variety of personal, political, business, and cultural content, had become a primary internet platform. As a foreign-owned company with servers outside the country, Telegram was not under the control of national censors. Many officials blamed Telegram for the spread of protests in December 2017. After the ban on Telegram, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology began to disrupt access to circumvention tools used to access blocked applications or sites.

RSF reported that several bloggers and online journalists were arrested during the year for their expression. Blogger Hengameh Shahidi was arrested in May for tweets about her previous detention. Mohammad Hossien Hidari, the editor of the *Dolat e Bahar* news website, was arrested in May. His families and lawyers did not know what he had been charged with, and his website was inaccessible after his arrest. Amir Hossein Miresmaili, a journalist with the daily newspaper *Jahan Sanat (Industry World)*, was sentenced to 10 years in prison on August 22 for a tweet criticizing a mullah in Mashhad. Miresmaili's sentence also included a two-year ban on journalistic activity on social networks after his release from prison. According to his lawyer, Miresmaili was charged with "insulting the sacredness of Islam," "insulting government agents and officials," "publishing false information designed to upset public opinion," and "publishing immoral articles contrary to public decency."

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government significantly restricted academic freedom and the independence of higher education institutions. Authorities systematically targeted university campuses to suppress social and political activism by banning independent student organizations, imprisoning student activists, removing faculty, preventing students from enrolling or continuing their education because of their political or religious affiliation or activism, and restricting social sciences and humanities curricula.

According to a July HRW report, following the protests of December 2017 and January 2018, intelligence officers arrested at least 150 students and courts sentenced 17 to prison terms. Many of the arrested students did not participate in the protests but were preemptively detained, according to reports. HRW reported that as of mid-July, revolutionary courts had sentenced at least eight student protesters from universities in Tehran and Tabriz to prison sentences of up to eight

years. Some students were banned from membership in political parties or participating in media, including social media, for two years.

Authorities barred Bahai students from higher education and harassed those who studied through the unrecognized online university of the Bahai Institute for Higher Education. According to a HRANA report in September, more than 50 Bahai college applicants had been denied enrollment for their religious affiliation (see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/)).

The government maintained controls on cinema, music, theater, and art exhibits and censored those productions deemed to transgress Islamic values. The government censored or banned films deemed to promote secularism, non-Islamic ideas about women's rights, unethical behavior, drug abuse, violence, or alcoholism.

According to the IHRDC, the nine-member film review council of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, made up of clerics, former directors, former parliamentarians, and academics, must approve the content of every film before production and again before screening. Films may be barred arbitrarily from screening even if all the appropriate permits were received in advance.

According to media reports, renowned film director Jafar Panahi was banned again from traveling to the 2018 Cannes film festival. Panahi has been barred from traveling since 2010, when he was charged with generating "propaganda against the Islamic Republic."

Officials continued to discourage teaching music in schools. Authorities considered heavy metal and foreign music religiously offensive, and police continued to repress underground concerts and arrest musicians and music distributors. The Ministry of Culture must officially approve song lyrics, music, and album covers as complying with the country's moral values, although many underground musicians released albums without seeking such permission.

According to media reports in February, Benyamin Bahadori, a pop singer and composer, cancelled a concert in Kerman after female members of his music group were banned from appearing on stage. In April, according to media reports, the head of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Mashhad was arrested for undermining public decency and disrespecting laws when videos surfaced on

social media networks showing young men and women dancing at a concert at a shopping center in the city.

## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The government severely restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution permits assemblies and marches of unarmed persons “provided they do not violate the principles of Islam.” In order to prevent activities it considered antiregime, the government restricted this right and closely monitored gatherings such as public entertainment and lectures, student and women’s meetings and protests, meetings and worship services of minority religious groups, labor protests, online gatherings and networking, funeral processions, and Friday prayer gatherings.

According to activists, the government arbitrarily applied rules governing permits to assemble, with proregime groups rarely experiencing difficulty, while groups viewed as critical of the regime experienced harassment regardless of whether authorities issued a permit.

The government cracked down on small protests that began in the city of Mashhad in December 2017 and continued into 2018. These protests subsequently spread across the country and included broader economic and political grievances with the nation’s leadership. International media and human rights organizations widely covered the government’s crackdown on protests. According to media reports, at least 20 protesters were killed as of January, and thousands more were arrested throughout the year. Official government sources cited 4,970 arrested, 90 percent of whom were younger than 25 years old. Over the year, as protests arose across the country among various groups and by individuals expressing diverse grievances and demands, actions by security forces resulted in hundreds of additional arrests and further alleged deaths.

CHRI reported that authorities denied detainees access to attorneys and threatened them with charges that carried the death penalty if they sought counsel. There were multiple reports of detainees beaten while in custody. Several human rights organizations, including CHRI, reported that detainees were given pills of unknown substance, including methadone, to portray them as drug addicts.

According to CHRI, at least two detainees died under suspicious circumstances while in detention, while the death of a third detainee was labeled a “suicide” (see section 1.a.).

In February security forces violently cracked down on a group of Gonabadi Sufi dervishes in Tehran who were protesting to demand the release of a 70-year-old fellow Sufi, Nematollah Riahi, who protesters believed was unjustly detained because of his religious affiliation. According to CHRI and reports from Sufi news sites, at least 300 hundred Gonabadi Sufis were arrested and imprisoned in the Great Tehran Penitentiary and Qarchak Prison, with numerous deaths reported at the hands of security forces. Reports indicated that the government’s crackdown continued in various cities throughout the country and that Sufis were subjected to torture and forced confessions in detention centers prior to their transfer to prisons.

According to an August HRW report, revolutionary courts sentenced at least 208 Gonabadi Sufi dervishes, from the hundreds detained, in unfair trials to prison terms ranging from four months to 26 years, flogging, internal exile, travel bans, and a ban on membership in social and political groups. Authorities did not allow the defendants to choose their legal representation and repeatedly insulted and questioned their faith during trials that lasted as little as 15 minutes. More than 40 dervishes received sentences in absentia.

In August Great Tehran Penitentiary authorities conducted a “brutal” attack, according to CHRI, on Gonabadi Sufis prisoners who were peacefully protesting the harsh treatment of female Gonabadi Sufi prisoners at Qarchak Prison. According to the report, several detainees were badly injured and suffered broken bones, while female prisoners in Qarchak Prison were reportedly subjected to torture and beatings by prison officials.

### **Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for the establishment of political parties, professional and political associations, and Islamic and recognized religious minority organizations, as long as such groups do not violate the principles of freedom, sovereignty, national unity, or Islamic criteria, or question Islam as the basis of the country’s system of government. The government limited the freedom of association through threats, intimidation, the imposition of arbitrary requirements on organizations, and the arrests of group leaders and members.

The government barred teachers from commemorating International Labor Day and Teachers' Day. Several prominent teachers and union activists either remained in prison or were awaiting new sentences, including Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi and Esmail Abdi (see section 7.a.).

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

### **d. Freedom of Movement**

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, with some exceptions, particularly concerning migrants and women. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with regard to refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq.

In-country Movement: Judicial sentences sometimes included internal exile after release from prison, which prevented individuals from traveling to certain provinces. Women often required the supervision of a male guardian or chaperone to travel and faced official and societal harassment for traveling alone.

Foreign Travel: The government required exit permits for foreign travel for all citizens. Citizens who were educated at government expense or received scholarships had to either repay the scholarship or receive a temporary permit to exit the country. The government restricted the foreign travel of some religious leaders, members of religious minorities, and scientists in sensitive fields.

Several journalists, academics, opposition politicians, human and women's rights activists, and artists remained subject to foreign travel bans and had their passports confiscated during the year. Married women were not allowed to travel outside the country without prior permission from their husbands.

Exile: The law does not provide for forced exile abroad. Many citizens practiced self-imposed exile to express their beliefs freely or escape government harassment.

### **Protection of Refugees**

According to UNHCR, the government had granted registration to 950,142 Afghan and 28,268 Iraqi refugees under a system known as *amayesh*, through which authorities provide refugees with cards identifying them as legally registered refugees. The cards enable refugees to access basic services and facilitate the issuance of work permits. In addition to registered refugees, the government estimated it hosted 450,000 Afghans who hold Afghan passports and Iranian visas and 1.5 million undocumented Afghans.

HRW and other groups reported that the government continued its mistreatment of many Afghans, including physical abuse by security forces, deportations, forced recruitment to fight in Syria (see section 1.g.), detention in unsanitary and inhuman conditions, forced payment for transportation to and accommodation in deportation camps, forced labor, forced separation from families, restricted movement within the country, and restricted access to education or jobs.

Refoulement: According to activist groups and NGOs, authorities routinely arrested Afghans without *amayesh* cards and sometimes threatened them with deportation. According to the International Organization for Migration, from the beginning of the year to August, more than 219,254 undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan, with many claiming they were pressured to leave. In addition more than 273,089 were deported there throughout the year.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status to qualified applicants. While the government reportedly has a system for providing protection to refugees, UNHCR did not have information regarding how the country made asylum determinations. According to HRW, the government continued to block many Afghans from registering to obtain refugee status.

Afghans not registered under the *amayesh* system who had migrated in the past decades of conflict in their home country continued to be denied access to an asylum system or access to register with the United Nations as refugees. NGOs reported many of these displaced asylum seekers believed they were pressured to leave the country but could not return to Afghanistan because of the security situation in their home provinces.

Freedom of Movement: Refugees faced restrictions on in-country movement and faced restrictions from entering certain provinces, according to UNHCR.

Employment: Only refugees with government-issued work permits were able to work. NGO sources reported that *amayesh* cards were difficult to renew and were

often prohibitively expensive for refugees to maintain due to steep annual renewal fees.

Access to Basic Services: *Amayesh* cardholders had access to primary education and received primary health care, including vaccinations, prenatal care, maternal and child health, and family planning from the Ministry of Health. They also benefited from a universal basic health insurance package for hospitalization and paraclinical services (medicine, doctor’s visits, radiology, etc.) similar to citizens, and those with qualifying “special diseases” received comprehensive coverage.

In 2017 more than 112,000 vulnerable refugees enrolled in the Universal Public Health Insurance scheme providing coverage for 12 months, and in 2018 92,000 vulnerable refugees were expected to benefit from subsidized premium support from UNHCR.

The government claimed to grant refugees access to schools. More than 420,000 refugee children were enrolled in primary and secondary school, out of whom 103,000 were undocumented Afghan children. According to media reporting, however, Afghans continued to have difficulty gaining access to education. The government sometimes imposed fees for children of registered refugees to attend public schools.

There were barriers to marriage between citizens and displaced Afghans. Authorities required Afghans to obtain documentation from their embassy or government offices in Afghanistan to register their marriage in the country, according to media reporting. The law states, “Any foreigner who marries an Iranian woman without the permission of the Iranian government will be sentenced to two to five years in prison plus a cash penalty.” Furthermore, authorities considered children born from such unions eligible for citizenship only if the child’s father is a citizen and registers the child as his, potentially leaving many children stateless.

Most provinces’ residency limitations on refugees effectively denied them access to public services, such as public housing, in the restricted areas of those provinces.

### **Stateless Persons**

There were no accurate numbers on how many stateless persons resided in the country. Stateless persons included those without birth documents or refugee

identification cards. They were subjected to inconsistent government policies and relied on charities, principally domestic, to obtain medical care and schooling. Authorities prohibited stateless persons from receiving formal government support or travel documents.

Women may not directly transmit citizenship to their children or to noncitizen spouses. Only children born to Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers who reside in Iran for 18 years and whose parents' marriage is officially registered with the government are eligible to apply for citizenship. According to media reports, between 400,000 and one million persons lacked Iranian nationality despite having an Iranian citizen mother, due to limitations on citizenship transmission (see section 6, Children).

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose the president, as well as members of the Assembly of Experts and parliament, through elections based on universal suffrage. Candidate vetting conducted by unelected bodies, however, abridged this right in all instances. Reported government constraints on freedom of expression and the media; peaceful assembly; association; and the ability to freely seek, receive, and impart information and campaign also limited Iranians' right to freely choose their representatives in elections.

The Assembly of Experts, which is composed of 86 popularly elected clerics who serve eight-year terms, elects the supreme leader, who acts as the de facto head of state and may be removed only by a vote of the assembly. The Guardian Council vets and qualifies candidates for all Assembly of Experts, presidential, and parliamentary elections based on criteria that include candidates' allegiance to the state and adherence to Shia Islam. The council consists of six clerics appointed by the supreme leader and six jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary (who is appointed by the supreme leader) and approved by parliament.

There is no separation of state and religion, and certain clerics had significant influence in the government.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: Presidential and local council elections were held in May 2017. The country's electoral system continued to fall short of international standards for free and fair elections because of the Guardian Council's controlling role in the

political process, including determining which individuals could run for office, and in certain instances, arbitrarily removing winning candidates.

In 2017 the Guardian Council approved six Shia male candidates for president from a total candidate pool of 1,636 individuals (0.37 percent of total applicants). Voters re-elected Hassan Rouhani as president. The Interior Ministry announced that Rouhani won 57 percent of the votes, with a 73 percent turnout of eligible voters.

Candidates for local elections were vetted by monitoring boards established by parliament, resulting in the disqualification of a number of applicants. Observers asserted that reformist candidates such as Abdollah Momeni, Ali Tajernia, and Nasrin Vaziri, previously imprisoned for peacefully protesting the 2009 election, were not allowed to run due to their political views.

CHRI reported that on July 21, the Expediency Council, the country's highest arbiter of disputes between state branches, voted by a two-thirds majority to amend the Law on the Formation, Duties, and Election of National Islamic Councils, thus affirming the right of constitutionally recognized religious minorities to run in local elections. As a result of this ruling, Sepanta Niknam, a member of the Zoroastrian faith, was able to reclaim his city council seat in Yazd, from which he was suspended in 2017 because of his religion. Niknam had been re-elected to the Yazd city council in May 2017 but was forced to step down in September 2017 after the local court ruled that Niknam, as member of a religious minority, could not be elected to a council in a Muslim-majority constituency.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution provides for the formation of political parties, but the Interior Ministry granted licenses only to parties deemed to adhere to the “governance of the jurist” system of government embodied in the constitution. Registered political organizations that adhered to the system generally operated without restriction, but most were small, focused around an individual, and without nationwide membership. Members of political parties and persons with any political affiliation that the regime deemed unacceptable faced harassment and sometimes violence and imprisonment. The government maintained bans on several opposition organizations and political parties. Security officials continued to harass, intimidate, and arrest members of the political opposition and some reformists (see section 1.e.). In her August 2017 report, UNSR Jahangir noted a number of arrests and detentions of members of opposition parties in the months before the May 2017 elections.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women faced significant legal, religious, and cultural barriers to political participation. According to the Guardian Council's interpretation, the constitution bars women, as well as persons of foreign origin, from serving as supreme leader or president, as members of the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, or the Expediency Council, and as certain types of judges.

The Guardian Council disqualified all 137 women who registered as candidates for the May 2017 presidential election. Almost 18,000 female candidates, or 6.3 percent of all candidates, were permitted to run for positions in the 2017 local elections.

All cabinet-level ministers were men. A limited number of women held senior government positions, including that of Vice President for Legal Affairs and Vice President for Women and Family Affairs.

Practitioners of a religion other than Shia Islam are barred from serving as supreme leader or president, as well as being a member in the Assembly of Experts, Guardian Council, or Expediency Council. The law reserves five seats in parliament for members of recognized minority religious groups, although minorities may also be elected to nonreserved seats. The five reserved seats were filled by one Zoroastrian, one Jew, and three Christians. There were no non-Muslims in the cabinet or on the Supreme Court.

#### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government implemented the law arbitrarily, sometimes pursuing apparently legitimate corruption cases against officials while bringing politically motivated charges against regime critics or political opponents. Most officials continued to engage in corrupt practices with impunity. Many expected bribes for providing routine services or received bonuses outside their regular work, and individuals routinely bribed officials to obtain permits for otherwise illegal construction.

Endowed religious charitable foundations, or *bonyads*, accounted for a quarter to a third of the country's economy, according to some experts. Government insiders, including members of the military and clergy, ran these tax-exempt organizations, which are defined under law as charities. Members of the political opposition and international corruption watchdog organizations frequently accused *bonyads* of

corruption. *Bonyads* received benefits from the government, but no government agency is required to approve their budgets publicly.

Numerous companies and subsidiaries affiliated with the IRGC engaged in trade and business activities, sometimes illicitly, including in the telecommunications, mining, and construction sectors. Other IRGC entities reportedly engaged in smuggling pharmaceutical products, narcotics, and raw materials. The domestic and international press reported that individuals with strong government connections had access to foreign currency at preferential exchange rates, allowing them to exploit a gap between the country's black market and official exchange rates.

Corruption: In August IRNA reported that Ahmad Araghchi, an Iran Central Bank deputy in charge of foreign currency affairs, was arrested, along with six others, as part of an investigation into financial corruption. IRNA quoted Judiciary spokesperson Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei saying the arrests were part of the country's ongoing crackdown on graft and corruption in the foreign currency sector. According to the Mizan News Agency, at least 67 persons had been arrested as of August, accused of fraud and trying to undermine the banking system. Mohseni Ejei was quoted saying several of the individuals arrested had direct ties to the government and, charged with "corruption on Earth," could face the death penalty. He stated more than 100 government employees had been barred from leaving the country. According to the same report, Supreme Leader Khamenei approved a request from the head of the judiciary to set up special revolutionary courts to try individuals for economic crimes, seeking maximum sentences for those who "disrupted and corrupted" the economy. Khamenei was quoted saying that punishments for those accused of economic corruption, including government officials and those from the military, should be carried out swiftly. According to a BBC report, at least three businessmen were executed for corruption after trials that human rights groups said lacked due process protections.

According to media reports, in July parliamentarian Amir Khojasteh, president of the parliament's anticorruption caucus, claimed during an open session of parliament that \$44 billion had been allocated for goods that were never imported and that \$60 billion in goods were hoarded in warehouses.

Financial Disclosure: Regulations require government officials, including cabinet ministers and members of the Guardian Council, Expediency Council, and Assembly of Experts, to submit annual financial statements to the government inspectorate. Little information was available on whether the government

effectively implemented the law, whether officials obeyed the law, or whether financial statements were publicly accessible.

In an August televised interview, President Rouhani asserted his intent to ramp up anticorruption efforts, stating the government had no “red lines” when it came to fighting corruption. According to media reports, Rouhani earlier directed all government ministries to publish the names of individuals and entities that had received hard currency at the official exchange rate. In June the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology published the names of entities that had received foreign exchange at the official rate to import mobile phones, while the Central Bank of Iran published a similar list of entities that had received currency at the official exchange rate.

### **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

The government restricted the operations of and did not cooperate with local or international human rights NGOs investigating alleged violations of human rights. The government restricted the work of domestic activists and often responded to their inquiries and reports with harassment, arrests, online hacking, and monitoring of individual activists and organization workplaces.

By law NGOs must register with the Ministry of Interior and apply for permission to receive foreign grants. Independent human rights groups and other NGOs faced continued harassment because of their activism, as well as the threat of closure by government officials following prolonged and often arbitrary delays in obtaining official registration.

During the year the government prevented some human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, and scholars from traveling abroad. Human rights activists reported intimidating telephone calls, threats of blackmail, online hacking attempts, and property damage from unidentified law enforcement and government officials. The government summoned activists repeatedly for questioning and confiscated personal belongings such as mobile phones, laptops, and passports. Government officials sometimes harassed and arrested family members of human rights activists. Courts routinely suspended sentences of convicted human rights activists, leaving open the option for authorities to arrest or imprison individuals arbitrarily at any time on the previous charges.

In her March report, UNSR Jahangir expressed concern about the arrest, arbitrary detention, and sentencing of human rights defenders, student activists, journalists, and lawyers. She noted acts of intimidation and reprisals in detention, including torture and mistreatment, as well as reports of reprisals against human rights defenders for engaging the UNSR and cooperating with other UN mechanisms.

According to NGO sources, including HRW and Amnesty International, the government's rights record and its level of cooperation with international rights institutions remained poor. The government continued to deny requests from international human rights NGOs to establish offices in or to conduct regular investigative visits to the country. The most recent visit of an international human rights NGO was by Amnesty International in 2004 as part of the European Union's human rights dialogue with the country.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: During the year the government continued to deny repeated requests by the UNSR on the situation of human rights in Iran to visit the country.

On November 15, for the sixth consecutive year, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution expressing serious concern about the country's continuing human rights violations. The resolution repeated its call for the country to cooperate with UN special mechanisms, citing the government's failure to approve any request from a UN thematic special procedures mandate holder to visit the country in more than a decade. It drew attention to the government's continued failure to allow the UNSR into the country to investigate human rights abuses despite repeated requests. The most recent visit by a UN human rights agency to the country was in 2005.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The High Council for Human Rights, headed by Mohammad Javad Larijani, is part of the judicial branch of the government and lacks independence. The council continued to defend the imprisonment of high-profile human rights defenders and political opposition leaders, despite domestic and international pressure. Larijani continued to call for an end to the position of the UNSR. There was no information available on whether the council challenged any laws or court rulings during the year.

## **Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons**

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal and subject to strict penalties, including death, but it remained a problem. The law considers sex within marriage consensual by definition and, therefore, does not address spousal rape, including in cases of forced marriage. Most rape victims likely did not report the crime because they feared official retaliation or punishment for having been raped, including charges of indecency, immoral behavior, or adultery, the last of which carries the death penalty. Rape victims also feared societal reprisal or ostracism.

For a conviction of rape, the law requires four Muslim men or a combination of three men and two women or two men and four women, to have witnessed a rape. A woman or man found making a false accusation of rape is subject to 80 lashes. In June international media reported on the kidnapping and gang rape of at least 41 women and girls in the city of Iranshahr, Sistan va Baluchistan Province, which has a predominantly Baluchi population. According to the reports, authorities initially tried to deny the cases, leading to local protests. Reports indicated that some of the alleged perpetrators had ties to local security forces. Social media users expressed their anger and sought support for the victims online through an #Iranshahr girls campaign. Some of the social media participants, including Abdollah Bozorgzadeh, were reportedly harassed and arrested for their online activism.

The law does not prohibit domestic violence. Authorities considered abuse in the family a private matter and seldom discussed it publicly.

A 2017 CHRI report referenced a study presented at the nongovernmental Imam Ali Foundation's May 2017 conference in Tehran on violence against women in the country, according to which 32 percent of women in urban areas and 63 percent in rural areas had been victims of domestic violence. A government official was quoted in the report saying that 11,000 cases of domestic abuse had been registered by the National Welfare Organization. In January, according to media reports, the state-run Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) apologized after an alleged relationship expert and marriage counselor advised domestic violence victims during a television broadcast to kiss their husband's feet, leading to a large social media backlash in the country. Some users reportedly mocked the advice and characterized it as "nonsense" and "scary."

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law criminalizes FGM/C and states, "the cutting or removing of the two sides of female genitalia leads to *diyeh* (financial penalty or blood money) equal to half the full amount of *diyeh* for the woman's life."

Little current data was available on the practice inside the country, although older data and media reports suggested it was most prevalent in Hormozgan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan Provinces.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: There were no official reports of killings motivated by “honor” or other harmful traditional practices during the year, although human rights activists reported that such killings continued to occur, particularly among rural and tribal populations.

The law reduces punitive measures for fathers and other family members who are convicted of murder or physically harming children in domestic violence or “honor killings.” If a man is found guilty of murdering his daughter, the punishment is between three and 10 years in prison rather than the normal death sentence or payment of *diyeh* for homicide cases.

Sexual Harassment: The law addresses sexual harassment in the context of physical contact between men and women and prohibits physical contact between unrelated men and women. There was no reliable data on the extent of sexual harassment, but women and human rights observers reported that sexual harassment was the norm in many workplaces. There were no known government efforts to address this problem.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The constitution provides for equal protection for women under the law in conformity with its interpretation of Islam. The government did not enforce the law, and provisions in the law, particularly sections dealing with family and property law, discriminate against women. Judicial harassment, intimidation, detention, and smear campaigns significantly challenged the ability of civil society organizations to fight for and protect women’s rights.

Women may not transmit citizenship to their children or to a noncitizen spouse. The government does not recognize marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, irrespective of their citizenship. The law states that a virgin woman or girl wishing to wed needs the consent of her father or grandfather or the court’s permission.

The law permits a man to have as many as four wives and an unlimited number of *sigheh* (temporary wives), based on a Shia custom under which couples may enter into a limited-time civil and religious contract, which outlines the union's conditions.

A woman has the right to divorce if her husband signs a contract granting that right; cannot provide for his family; has violated the terms of their marriage contract; or is a drug addict, insane, or impotent. A husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. The law recognizes a divorced woman's right to part of shared property and to alimony. These laws were not always enforced.

The government actively suppressed efforts to build awareness among women of their rights regarding marriage and divorce. According to a CHRI report, in September the IRGC Intelligence Organization arrested Hoda Amid, a human rights attorney, and Najmeh Vahedi, a prominent sociologist and women's rights activist, three days before they were supposed to host a workshop about the country's marriage laws, which they had organized with a legal permit. One of the purposes of the workshop was to teach women how to expand their rights with legally binding prenuptial contracts.

The law provides divorced women preference in custody for children up to age seven, but fathers maintain legal guardianship rights over the child and must agree on many legal aspects of the child's life (such as issuing travel documents, enrolling in school, or filing a police report). After the child reaches the age of seven, the father is granted custody unless he is proven unfit to care for the child.

Women sometimes received disproportionate punishment for crimes such as adultery, including death sentences. Islamic law retains provisions that equate a woman's testimony in a court of law to half that of a man's and value a woman's life as half that of a man's. According to the law, the *diyeh* paid in the death of a woman is half the amount paid in the death of a man, with the exception of car accident insurance payments.

Women have access to primary and advanced education. According to 2017 media reports, women gaining admission to universities nationwide outnumbered men by 13 percent. Quotas and other restrictions nonetheless limited women's admissions to certain fields and degree programs.

As domestic media reported during the year, women's participation in the job market remained as low as 16 percent. Women reportedly earned 41 percent less

than men for the same work. Unemployment among women in the country was twice as high as it was among men.

Women continued to face discrimination in home and property ownership, as well as access to financing. In cases of inheritance, male heirs receive twice the inheritance of their female counterparts. The government enforced gender segregation in many public spaces. Women must ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter some public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances.

The law provides that a woman who appears in public without appropriate attire, such as a cloth scarf veil (*hijab*) over the head and a long jacket (*manteau*), or a large full-length cloth covering (*chador*), may be sentenced to flogging and fined. Absent a clear legal definition of “appropriate attire” or of the related punishment, women were subjected to the opinions of various disciplinary and security force members, police, and judges.

Throughout the year government and security forces cracked down on peaceful nationwide protests against dress restrictions.

In January several women in Tehran and Isfahan protested the compulsory hijab law by standing on platforms, publicly removing their headscarves, and waving them like flags. They were following the example of Vida Movahed, who performed a similar act of defiance in December 2017 on Revolution Street in Tehran. Pictures of Movahed--who disappeared for a month during detention by security forces at an unknown location--performing the act went viral online. According to reports, Movahed was sentenced in March to 24 months in prison but was released on bail.

In February authorities arrested 29 women in Tehran for peacefully protesting the mandatory dress law. Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri was quoted downplaying the significance of the protests, calling them “childish,” “emotionally charged,” and fomented from outside the country. One of the protesters, Narges Hosseini, a sociology student, was arrested and in March sentenced to two years in prison. Maryam Shariatmadari, a computer science student, was sentenced to one year in prison for “encouraging corruption by removing her hijab.” According to media reports and Amnesty International, Shaparak Shajarizadeh fled the country after being arrested on multiple occasions, subjected to torture and beatings, and released on bail in April; she reportedly was sentenced in absentia to 20 years in

prison for peacefully protesting. According to reports, other women and some men were arrested throughout the country for similar activities.

In March, according to an HRW report, police arrested approximately 35 women who had gathered outside Azadi Stadium in Tehran seeking to watch a soccer match. In June, however, authorities allowed women and men into the same stadium to watch a live streaming of the national football team competing at the World Cup, and in October close to 100 women were allowed to attend a live match.

As noted by the former UNSR and other organizations, female athletes have been traditionally barred from participating in international tournaments, either by the country's sport agencies or by their husbands. There were, however, cases throughout the year of female athletes being permitted to travel internationally to compete.

## **Children**

The country established the National Body on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2012 to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which it is a signatory. The Ministry of Justice oversees the body, which reviews draft regulations and legislation relating to children's rights.

The country last underwent a periodic panel review by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016. The review noted many concerns, including discrimination against girls; children with disabilities; unregistered, refugee, and migrant children; and LGBTI minors.

There is a separate juvenile court system. Male juvenile detainees were held in separate rehabilitation centers in most urban areas, but female juvenile detainees and male juvenile detainees in rural areas were held alongside adults in detention facilities, according to NGO reports presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (See section 1.c. for the situation of children held in prison with their incarcerated mothers.)

**Birth Registration:** Only a child's father conveys citizenship, regardless of the child's country of birth or mother's citizenship. Birth within the country's borders does not confer citizenship, except when a child is born to unknown parents. The law requires that all births be registered within 15 days.

Education: Although primary schooling until age 11 is free and compulsory for all, media and other sources reported lower enrollment in rural areas, especially for girls.

Children without state-issued identification cards are denied the right to education. In her March report, UNSR Jahangir noted that in Sistan va Baluchistan Province, the Cabinet of Ministers requested the Ministry of Education to issue a special card for children without birth certificates so they could attend school. As a result, more than 20,000 children who had received such cards registered for school and 19,000 were allowed to attend.

Child Abuse: There was little information available on how the government dealt with child abuse. The law states, “Any form of abuse of children and juveniles that causes physical, psychological, or moral harm and threatens their physical or mental health is prohibited,” and such crimes carry a maximum sentence of three months in confinement or 10 million rials (\$235).

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage for girls is 13, but girls as young as nine years old may be married with permission from the court and their fathers. In 2017 UNICEF reported that 17 percent of girls in the country were married before reaching age 18 and that approximately 40,000 were married before 15. In her March report, UNSR Jahangir stated this number was likely higher, as thousands of underage marriages were not reported. The UNSR also previously cited statistics from the Tehran-based Association to Protect the Rights of Children, according to which 17 percent of all marriages in the country involved girls married to “old men.”

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The legal age requirements for consensual sex are the same as those for marriage, as sex outside of marriage is illegal. There are no specific laws regarding child sexual exploitation, with such crimes either falling under the category of child abuse or sexual crimes of adultery. The law does not directly address sexual molestation nor provide a punishment for it.

In July, according to media reports, a supervisor at a private boys’ school in Tehran was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 80 lashes for sexually abusing students at the school. Tehran Prosecutor Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi was reported by the press saying the parents of 15 students had complained that their children were raped or otherwise sexually abused.

According to the CHRI, the legal ambiguity between child abuse and sexual molestation could lead to child sexual molestation cases being prosecuted under adultery law. While no separate provision exists for the rape of a child, the crime of rape, regardless of the victim's age, is potentially punishable by death.

Displaced Children: There were thousands of Afghan refugee children in the country, many of whom were born in Iran but could not obtain identity documents. These children were often unable to attend schools or access basic government services and were vulnerable to labor exploitation and trafficking.

In its 2016 report, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted continued “allegations of abuse and ill treatment of refugee and asylum-seeking children by police and security forces.” UNHCR stated that school enrollment among refugees was generally higher outside camps and settlements, where greater resources were available.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

The law recognizes Jews as a religious minority and provides for their representation in parliament. According to the 2011 census, the Jewish community numbered approximately 8,700. Government officials continued to question the history of the Holocaust, and anti-Semitism remained a pervasive problem. In November President Rouhani called Israel a “cancerous tumor” and a “fake regime.”

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

## **Persons with Disabilities**

In March parliament adopted the Law for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. According to HRW, the law increases pensions and extends

insurance coverage to disability-related healthcare services, but the new law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination. No information was available regarding authorities' effectiveness in enforcing the law. The law prohibits those with visual, hearing, or speech disabilities from running for seats in parliament. While the law provides for government-funded vocational education for persons with disabilities, domestic news reports noted vocational centers were located only in urban areas and unable to meet the needs of the entire population.

As HRW reported, persons with disabilities remained cut off from society. They continued to face stigma and discrimination from government social workers, health-care workers, and others. Many persons with disabilities remained trapped in their homes, unable to live independently and participate in society on an equal basis. The law provides for public accessibility to government-funded buildings, and new structures appeared to comply with these standards. There were efforts to increase access for persons with disabilities to historical sites. Government buildings that predated existing accessibility standards remained largely inaccessible, and general building accessibility for persons with disabilities remained a problem. Persons with disabilities had limited access to informational, educational, and community activities. CHRI reported that refugees with disabilities, particularly children, were often excluded or denied the ability to obtain the limited state services provided by the government. CHRI also reported that, according to the director of the State Welfare Organization, 60 percent of persons with disabilities remained unemployed.

### **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

The constitution grants equal rights to all ethnic minorities, allowing minority languages to be used in the media. Article 101 of the Charter on Citizens' Rights grants the right of citizens to learn, use, and teach their own languages and dialects. In practice minorities did not enjoy equal rights, and the government consistently barred use of their languages in school as the language of instruction.

The government disproportionately targeted minority groups, including Kurds, Ahwazis, Azeris, and Baluchis, for arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention, disappearances, and physical abuse. In its 2016 panel review on the country, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reported "widespread discrimination against children of ethnic minorities," as well as "reported targeted arrests, detentions, imprisonments, killings, torture, and executions against such groups by the law enforcement and judicial authorities."

These ethnic minority groups reported political and socioeconomic discrimination, particularly in their access to economic aid, business licenses, university admissions, job opportunities, permission to publish books, and housing and land rights.

Another widespread complaint among ethnic minority groups during the year, particularly among Ahwazis, Azeris and Lors, was that the government diverted and mismanaged natural resources, primarily water, often for the benefit of IRGC-affiliated contractors. According to reports from international media and human rights groups, these practices had devastated the local environment on which farmers and others depended for their livelihoods and well-being, resulting in forced migration and further marginalization of these communities. Throughout the year the government forcefully cracked down on environment-related protests that were largely centered in these ethnic minority communities. According to international media reports, in July the government forcefully suppressed protests over the scarcity of clean water in Khorramshahr, Khuzestan Province. Hundreds were arrested and at least four protesters were reported killed after security forces opened fire on the crowd.

The law, which requires religious screening and allegiance to the concept of “governance by the jurist,” not found in Sunni Islam, impaired the ability of Sunni Muslims (many of whom are also Baluch, Ahwazi, or Kurdish) to integrate into civic life and to work in certain fields.

Human rights organizations observed that the government’s application of the death penalty disproportionately affected ethnic minorities. Authorities reportedly subjected members of minority ethnicities and religious groups in pretrial detention repeatedly to more severe physical punishment, including torture, than other prisoners, regardless of the type of crime for which authorities accused them.

The estimated eight million ethnic Kurds in the country frequently campaigned for greater regional autonomy. The government continued to use the law to arrest and prosecute Kurds for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association. The government reportedly banned Kurdish-language newspapers, journals, and books and punished publishers, journalists, and writers for opposing and criticizing government policies.

Authorities suppressed legitimate activities of Kurdish NGOs by denying them registration permits or bringing security charges against persons working with such

organizations. Authorities did not prohibit the use of the Kurdish language in general.

Amnesty International reported on the forced disappearances of five Kurdish men in June 2017. According to the report, Ramin Hossein Panahi, an alleged member of the Komala armed opposition group, was arrested after taking part in an armed clash with the IRGC in Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province. IRGC guards then arrested Panahi's brother and three other relatives, none of whom were reported to be involved with the armed clashes. After Ramin Panahi was sentenced to death in January 2018, he lived under the threat of an immediate execution while imprisoned in Sanandaj Central Prison. In August CHRI reported that Panahi had sewn his lips shut and gone on a hunger strike to protest the denial of his rights by prison authorities. The UN's special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, said that Panahi was denied access to a lawyer and a fair trial and that he was mistreated and tortured in detention. According to media reports, Panahi's torture including severe beatings, having his fingernails removed, and his head and body subjected to electric shocks. On September 8, authorities executed Panahi, along with two cousins, Zaniar and Loghman Moradi. International NGOs widely condemned the executions, claiming the prisoners had been tortured and sentenced to death following unfair trials based on forced confessions.

In April, according to international media reports and Kurdish rights groups, there were widespread peaceful protests and demonstrations over the government's closure of the Baneh border crossing with Iraq, a vital conduit for trade with northern Iraq's Kurdistan region. The government had also blocked since December 2017 the passes that Kurdish porters used to carry goods back and forth across the border. Rights groups said a number of Iranian Kurds were arrested and the internet was blocked during the protests.

International human rights observers, including the IHRDC, stated that the country's estimated two million Ahwazi Arabs, representing 110 tribes, faced continued oppression and discrimination. Ahwazi rights activists reported the government continued to confiscate Ahwazi property to use for government development projects, refusing to recognize the paper deeds of the local population from the prerevolutionary era.

In March thousands of Ahwazis gathered in Ahwaz and in cities across Khuzestan Province to protest against state-sanctioned discriminatory policies. The protests were in part triggered when IRIB excluded the community's cultural identity in an

Iranian New Year television show that was supposed to highlight the country's diversity. The protesters' peaceful demands for an apology from IRIB were met by a violent crackdown from government security forces. According to reports from Ahwazi rights groups and eyewitness accounts, at least 400 Ahwazis were unjustly arrested in cities across Khuzestan Province.

Ahwazi human rights groups reported that the government rounded up hundreds of Ahwazis following the September attack on a military parade in Ahwaz (estimates reported in November ranged from 600 to more than 800 arrests), while the state-run Tasnim news agency reported the arrest of 22 in connection with the attack (see section 1.a.). Ahwazi human rights groups also reported instances of torture of detainees in the Intelligence Ministry detention center in Ahwaz.

Ethnic Azeris, who number more than 18 million, or approximately 23-25 percent of the population, were more integrated into government and society than other ethnic minority groups and included the supreme leader. Azeris reported that the government discriminated against them by harassing Azeri activists or organizers and changing Azeri geographic names.

According to international media reports and Azeri human rights groups, in July authorities arrested at least 50 Azeris days ahead of an annual gathering at Fort Babak in Eastern Azerbaijan Province and threatened others. According to reports, the government has tried to prevent thousands of Iranians, mostly Azeri speaking activists, from meeting every year at Babak Fortress to peacefully celebrate the birthday of a historic figure, Babak Khorramdin. The annual gathering has general overtones of Azeri nationalism.

Local and international human rights groups alleged discrimination during the year against the Baluchi ethnic minority, estimated at between 1.5 and two million persons. Areas with large Baluchi populations were severely underdeveloped and had limited access to education, employment, health care, and housing, and Baluchi activists reported that more than 70 percent of the population lived below the poverty line.

According to activist reports, the law limited Sunni Baluchis' employment opportunities and political participation. Activists reported that throughout the year, the government sent hundreds of Shia missionaries to areas with large Sunni Baluch populations to try to convert the local population. According to Baluchi rights activists, Baluchi journalists and human rights activists faced arbitrary arrest, physical abuse, and unfair trials. In February Baloch Activists Campaign (BAC)

told CHRI that law enforcement agents had shot and killed at least 20 ethnic Baluchis and wounded 19 while allegedly pursuing suspected traffickers in Sistan va Baluchestan Province. According to BAC, government forces acted with impunity, with little provided in terms of justification for the deaths or means of restitution provided to victims' families.

See section 2.b. for information on mass arrests of Gonabadi Sufi dervishes.

### **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

The law criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual activity, which is punishable by death, flogging, or a lesser punishment. The law does not distinguish between consensual and nonconsensual same-sex intercourse, and NGOs reported this lack of clarity led to both the victim and the perpetrator being held criminally liable under the law in cases of assault. The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Security forces harassed, arrested, and detained individuals they suspected of being LGBTI. In some cases security forces raided houses and monitored internet sites for information on LGBTI persons. Those accused of "sodomy" often faced summary trials, and evidentiary standards were not always met. The Iranian LGBTI activist group 6Rang noted that individuals arrested under such conditions were traditionally subjected to forced anal or sodomy examinations, which the United Nations and World Health Organization said can constitute torture, and other degrading treatment and sexual insults. Punishment for same-sex sexual activity between men was more severe than between women. UNSR Jahangir reported in March receiving reports of the continued discrimination, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, punishment, and denial of rights of LGBTI persons.

The government censored all materials related to LGBTI status or conduct. Authorities particularly blocked websites or content within sites that discussed LGBTI issues, including the censorship of Wikipedia pages defining LGBTI and other related topics. There were active, unregistered LGBTI NGOs in the country. Hate crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms did not exist to aid in the prosecution of bias-motivated crimes.

The law requires all male citizens older than age 18 to serve in the military but exempts gay men and transgender women, who are classified as having mental disorders. New military identity cards listed the subsection of the law dictating the

exemption. According to 6Rang, this practice identified gay or transgender individuals and put them at risk of physical abuse and discrimination.

NGOs reported that authorities pressured LGBTI persons to undergo gender reassignment surgery.

According to a May report by 6Rang, the number of private and semigovernmental psychological and psychiatric clinics allegedly engaging in “corrective treatment” of LGBTI persons continued to grow during the year. 6Rang reported the increased use at such clinics of electric shock therapy to the hands and genitals of LGBTI persons, prescription of psychoactive medication, hypnosis, and coercive masturbation to pictures of the opposite sex. Many of these practices may constitute torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment under international law. According to the report, one such institution is called “The Anonymous Sex Addicts Association of Iran,” with branches in 18 provinces.

### **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

Despite government programs to treat and provide financial and other assistance to persons with HIV/AIDS, international news sources and organizations reported that individuals known to be infected with HIV/AIDS faced widespread societal discrimination. Individuals with HIV/AIDS, for example, continued to be denied employment as teachers.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The constitution provides for freedom of association, but neither the constitution nor law specifies trade union rights. The law states that workers may establish an Islamic labor council or a guild at any workplace, but the rights and responsibilities of these organizations fell significantly short of international standards for trade unions. In workplaces where workers established an Islamic labor council, authorities did not permit any other form of worker representation. The law requires prior authorization for organizing and concluding collective agreements. Strikes are prohibited in all sectors, although private sector workers may conduct “peaceful” campaigns within the workplace. The law does not apply to establishments with fewer than 10 employees.

Authorities did not respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and the government did not effectively enforce applicable laws. The government severely restricted freedom of association and interfered in worker attempts to organize. Labor activism was seen as a national security offense. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination and does not require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Antiunion discrimination occurred, and the government imprisoned, harassed, and restricted the activities of labor activists.

The Interior Ministry; the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare; and the Islamic Information Organization determined labor councils' constitutions, operational rules, and election procedures. Administrative and judicial procedures were lengthy. The Workers' House remained the only officially authorized national labor organization, and its leadership oversaw, granted permits to, and coordinated activities with Islamic labor councils in industrial, agricultural, and service organizations with more than 35 employees.

According to CHRI, the labor councils, which consisted of representatives of workers and a representative of management, were essentially management-run unions that undermined workers' efforts to maintain independent unions. The councils, nevertheless, sometimes could block layoffs and dismissals. There was no representative workers' organization for noncitizen workers.

According to international media reports, security forces continued to respond to workers' attempts to organize or conduct strikes with arbitrary arrests and violence. As economic conditions deteriorated, strikes and worker protests were numerous and widespread across the country throughout the year, often prompting a heavy police response. Security forces routinely monitored major worksites. According to CHRI, workers were routinely fired and risked arrest for striking, and labor leaders were charged with national security crimes for trying to organize workers.

CHRI reported that following protests in previous months, in June more than 60 workers at the Iran National Steel Industrial Group in Ahwaz, Khuzestan Province, were arrested for demanding their salaries, which had not been paid in three months. The Free Workers Union of Iran characterized the actions of security forces as a "barbaric raid" in the night.

According to a CHRI report, in August security forces violently suppressed protests at the Haft Tappeh sugarcane company in the southeast. Haft Tappeh, the country's largest sugar production plant, had been the site of ongoing protests

against unpaid wages and benefits for more than two years. Haft Tappeh's employees, according to media reports in August, had not received any salary since May. According to CHRI, at least five workers were detained and charged with national security crimes but later released on bail following negotiations between labor representatives and judicial officials. In November, however, HRW reported that authorities had arrested all members of Haft Tappeh's association of labor representatives, including Esmael Bakhshi and Mohsen Armand, two of the group's prominent leaders.

According to NGO and media reports, as in previous years, a number of trade unionists were imprisoned or remained unjustly detained for their peaceful activism. Mehdi Farahi Shandiz, a member of the Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Labor Unions in Iran, continued serving a three-year sentence, having been convicted of "insulting the supreme leader" and "disrupting public order." There were reports that Shandiz was beaten and tortured in Karaj Prison and kept for prolonged periods in solitary confinement.

The government continued to arrest and harass teachers' rights activists from the Teachers Association of Iran and related unions. In November HRW reported on the government's mounting crackdown against teachers participating in peaceful protests. HRW noted that the Telegram channel of the Council for Coordination among Teachers Unions reported the arrest of at least 12 teachers and the interrogation of 30 more. CHRI reported that IRGC agents arrested and beat teacher and trade union activist Mohammad Habibi in front of his students at Andisheh Technical High School in Shahriar in March. Habibi was sentenced to 10 and one-half years in prison. According to a CHRI report, Mahmoud Beheshti-Langroudi, the former spokesman for the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA), was incarcerated in Evin Prison in 2017 to begin serving a 14-year combined sentence for charges associated with his peaceful defense of labor rights. CHRI reported in July that Beheshti-Langroudi had commenced another hunger strike protesting his unjust sentence, the judiciary's refusal to review his case, and the mistreatment of political prisoners.

According to reports from international media and human rights organizations, truck drivers launched nationwide strikes over low and unpaid wages throughout the year. HRANA reported that the government arrested at least 261 drivers in 19 provinces following a round of protests in September and October. The drivers were threatened with heavy sentences, and Attorney General Mohammad Jaafar Montazeri issued a public statement suggesting that those who initiated the protest should be subject to the death penalty. In October the International Transport

Workers' Federation expressed concern over the government's harsh crackdown on labor action by truckers across the country, including the threat of the death penalty against organizers.

Esmail Abdi, a mathematics teacher and former secretary general of ITTA, continued serving a six-year prison sentence for labor rights activism. He was arrested in 2015 and convicted in 2016 for "propaganda against the state" and "collusion against national security." CHRI reported in April that Abdi had written a letter from Evin Prison criticizing the judiciary's "arbitrary and illegal rulings" and "widespread violations of the rights of teachers and workers in Iran." He decried the "criminalization of trade unions" and demanded a public trial that he had thus far been denied.

### **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not effectively enforce the law and made no significant effort to address forced labor during the year. Conditions indicative of forced labor sometimes occurred in the construction, domestic labor, and agricultural sectors, primarily among adult Afghan men. Family members and others forced children to work.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits employment of minors younger than age 15 and places restrictions on employment of minors younger than 18, such as prohibiting hard labor or night work. The law does not apply to domestic labor and permits children to work in agriculture and some small businesses from the age of 12. The government did not adequately monitor or enforce laws pertaining to child labor, and child labor remained a serious problem.

In its 2016 concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child cited a 2003 law that exempts workshops with fewer than 10 employees from labor regulations as increasing the risks of economic exploitation of children. It also noted serious concerns with the large number of children employed under hazardous conditions, such as in garbage collection, brick kilns, and industrial workshops, without protective clothing and for very low pay.

There were reportedly significant numbers of children, especially of Afghan descent, who worked as street vendors in major urban areas. According to official estimates, there were 60,000 homeless children, although many children's rights organizations estimated up to 200,000 homeless children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child reported that street children in particular were subjected to various forms of economic exploitation, including sexual abuse and exploitation by the public and police officers. Child labor also was used in the production of carpets and bricks. Children worked as beggars, and there were reports that criminals forced some children into begging rings. Reza Ghadimi, the managing director of the Tehran Social Services Organization, was quoted by ISNA saying that, according to a survey of 400 child laborers, 90 percent were "molested."

In September HRANA reported a Hamedan city councilman saying 550 child dumpster divers were active in Hamedan. They were reportedly employed by contractors paid by the city and were expected to collect an average of 170 pounds of recyclables daily, while deprived of all labor rights.

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The constitution bars discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, and social status "in conformity with Islamic criteria," but the government did not effectively enforce these prohibitions. According to the constitution, "everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests and does not infringe on the rights of others."

Despite this constitutional provision, the government made systematic efforts to limit women's access to the workplace. An Interior Ministry directive requires all officials to hire only secretaries of their own gender. Women remained banned from working in coffee houses and from performing music alongside men, with very limited exceptions made for traditional music. Women in many fields were restricted from working after 9 p.m. Hiring practices often discriminated against women, and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare guidelines stated that men should be given preferential hiring status.

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

In March the Supreme Labor Council, the government body charged with proposing labor regulations, agreed to raise the minimum wage by 19.8 percent to approximately 11 million rials (\$265) per month. There were reported complaints

that the minimum wage increase was too low in light of the plunging value of the Iranian rial against the U.S. dollar, which is used to price day-to-day goods.

The law establishes a maximum six-day, 44-hour workweek with a weekly rest day, at least 12 days of paid annual leave, and several paid public holidays. Any hours worked above that total entitles a worker to overtime. The law mandates a payment above the hourly wage to employees for any accrued overtime and provides that overtime work is not compulsory. The law does not cover workers in workplaces with fewer than 10 workers, nor does it apply to noncitizens.

Employers sometimes subjected migrant workers, most often Afghans, to abusive working conditions, including below-minimum-wage salaries, nonpayment of wages, compulsory overtime, and summary deportation without access to food, water, or sanitation facilities during the deportation process.

According to media reports, many workers continued to be employed on temporary contracts, under which they lacked protections available to full-time, noncontract workers and could be dismissed at any time without cause. Large numbers of workers employed in small workplaces or in the informal economy similarly lacked basic protections. Low wages, nonpayment of wages, and lack of job security due to contracting practices continued to be major drivers for strikes and protests, which occurred throughout the year.

According to local and international media reports, thousands of teachers, truckers, and workers from a wide variety of backgrounds and industries held largescale, countrywide rallies and protests demanding wage increases and payment of back wages throughout the year. Reports noted that these protests often drew a violent response from security forces, leading to numerous arrests.

Little information was available regarding labor inspection and related law enforcement. While the law provides for occupational health and safety standards, the government sometimes did not enforce these standards in either the formal or informal sectors. Workers reportedly lacked the power to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment.

Labor organizations alleged that hazardous work environments resulted in the deaths of thousands of workers annually. The state-run Iran Labor News Agency quoted the head of the Construction Workers Association, saying every year there were 1,200 deaths and 1,500 spinal cord injuries among construction workers,

while local media routinely reported on workers' deaths from explosions, gas poisoning, electrocution, or similar accidents.